

Washington State Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission

Position Statement on:

RNFA: Registered Nurse First Assistant at Surgery

The Registered Nurse (RN) can function in the position of First Surgical Assistant, as long as the nurse stays within the scope of practice of the Registered Nurse license and practices in collaboration with and under the on-site supervision and direction of a surgeon. The RN First Assistant does not concurrently function as a scrub nurse. The RN accepting this responsibility should have documented proficiency in perioperative nursing practice and training in asepsis and infection control, surgical anatomy, physiology, CPR, operative techniques and the recognition of safety hazards. The RN must be able to stabilize the patient if the surgeon becomes incapacitated and then maintain the patient until another physician arrives.

The activities included in first assisting are further refinements of perioperative nursing practice, which are executed within the context of the nursing process. The observable nursing behaviors are based on an extensive body of scientific knowledge. The intraoperative nursing behaviors may include, but are not limited to:

- handling tissue
- providing exposure
- using instruments
- suturing, and
- providing hemostasis.

In all situations, the RN is directly accountable and responsible to the individual consumer for the quality of nursing care rendered.

It is not within the scope of licensed practical nursing to be placed in the role of a first assistant to a surgeon. The first assist nursing role represents a specialized, expanded, scope of practice of the registered nurse, which builds upon the education obtained in the generic nursing program. In addition, a formal education program, which includes both didactic and supervised clinical instruction, is required along with experience in the scrubbing and circulating nurse roles. The licensed practical nurse recognizes and is able to meet the needs of the client in routine nursing situations. A routine nursing situation is one that is relatively free of scientific complexity.

A suggested resource for standards of practice and opportunities to become certified in this role is the Association of Perioperative Registered Nurse (AORN)

AORN
2170 South Parker Road Suite 300
Denver, CO 80231-5711
www.aorn.org/govt